

EMPLOYABILITY CAPITAL FOR TOUR GUIDES AT A WORLD HERITAGE SITE

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ABSTRACT

Aim. Employability has gained increased interest after the respective global shocks of 2008 and 2020. The study deepens the theory of employability in relation to a globally significant tourism industry. The aim of the study is to identify the core dimensions of the employability of tour-guides.

Method. The study adopted a qualitatively intrinsic case study at a world heritage site (WHS), namely the Maropeng Visitor Centre. The researcher focused on the notion of employability for tour-guides, based on existing research gaps regarding those two central concepts.

Results. The study determines the roles and responsibilities of tour-guides so as to align these to the notion of employability capital of tour-guides. Secondly, the study probed how higher education institutions (HEIs) should contribute to tour-guides' employability particularly, and their employability capital, generally. Moreover, misconceptions emerged about HEIs' offerings concerning employability and tour-guides' education.

Conclusions. Employability capital has become a factor influencing success in the work environment. This study revealed the importance of practical courses in tourism education (tour guiding, first aid, and additional languages) and highlighted the imperative to understand students' skills and capabilities within the scope of practical training courses.

Originality. The study advances knowledge on employability capital in relation to tour guiding at WHS. This would help to develop a better system that would increase employability capital in the tour-guiding sector.

Keywords: employability capital, World Heritage Sites, global South, higher education, tour guiding, employability skills

INTRODUCTION

Employability has become increasingly competitive in the current volatile world of work. Employability capital refers to the set of personal



resources enabling individuals to attain their goals as seminally (Trevor, 2001). Possessing employability attributes leads to positive outcomes. Employability capital can take the form of knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSA), or that of social networks which are critical for one's positioning on the labour market (Eby et al., 2003; McArdle et al. 2007; Van der Heijden, et al., 2009). For Charlie O. Trevor (2001), employability capital relates to a set of personal resources or capital that may influence an individual's employability. Two key conceptions stand out in this definition (Trevor, 2001). The first is that capital or personal resources are characteristics that help individuals to attain their personal and career goals (Peeters et al., 2019). These resources that can be fostered lead to positive outcomes. Employability capital can assume the form of knowledge, skills and attributes, or that of social networks, and, as such are crucial for one's positioning on the labour market (Eby et al., 2003; McQuad & Lindsay, 2005; Van der Heijden et al., 2009).

Employability refers to the likelihood of obtaining and retaining a job (Forrier et al., 2009). According to Ronald McQuaid and Colin Lindsay. (2005), employability plays a central role in the labour market, given that it escalates competitive advantage among employees and increases job performance. Higher education institutions are examining the methods they use to enhance student employability. HEI exercise various measure to grow and strengthen employability skills (Cheng et al., 2022). Inge Romgens, et al., (2020) integrated different approaches to employability to heighten the clarity of the definition of the term. In this integration, European streams are research-enriched in conceptualising employability definitions. Hence, their study argues that research streams define employability competences (Romgens, et al., 2020).

The ongoing discussion on graduate employability competences underlines the relevance of a focus on defining employability in a Western context (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Spowart et al., 2018; Gao, 2019). However, a generic approach might overlook the less known, non-European or non-Western frameworks, particularly given the cross-national or intercultural differences in the understanding of competences and thus employability, an area which this paper seeks to address.

Thus, the current study provides insights from a Global South context, South Africa, focusing on an increasingly important economic and employment-stimulating tourism sector. This study has integrated the various dimensions contained in the definition of "employability capital." (Peeters et al., 2019, p.79) Employability capital extends employability through joining-up dimensions of "of [both] obtaining and *retaining* [researcher emphasis] employment" (Peeters et al., 2019, p. 80) using personal, individual resources. As such, the researcher also set to delve into tour-guides' personal resources applicable to a significant context such as a WHS. In this way, the researcher modestly extend Peeters et al.'s (2019) lens.

Beverly Makopo (2018) notes that the tourism industry could not have offered high level customer service without the right employability configuration foregrounding interpersonal and problem-solving skills (Makopo et al., 2018). Within tourism, tour-guides play a critical role in the interface between the country's offerings and tourists' experience (Rabotic, 2010). Tour-guides ostensibly contribute to offering visitors the best experience of the tourist attraction while also acting as interpreters, mediators, safety officers and group leaders. To this effect, South African Tourism (SAT) (2014) provided a brief description of a tour-guide as a trained individual who provides all related information that tourists need to know about a specific tourist attraction as well as the interpretation of the site information in tourists' language of choice. Thus, tour-guides are ambassadors of South Africa as a travel destination. Yet, according to Rethabile C. Kosi (2015), tour-guides' roles have been overlooked. Additionally, within the policy of the National Department of Tourism: National Tourism Sector Strategy (NTSS) (2011), visitors have given an average score of "satisfied" regarding the experiences provided by tour guides. This warrants that attention be focused on the employability capital of tour-guides.

Although tour guide training is provided by the Culture, Arts, Tourism, Hospitality, and Sports Sector Education and Training Authority (CATHS-SETA), consequent employability cannot be taken for granted. Peeters et al. (2019) observe that it is not merely about finding a job, but rather harnessing "employability capital". This implies finding and maintaining employment. Employability is about a wider set of subjective attributes that enable a graduate to be successful in the work environment (Peeters et al., 2019; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). This benefits the tourism graduates, the workplace, the community and the economy, due to some form of industry exposure. Hence, for tour-guides to succeed and progress, it is important to foster as much employability capital as possible. This should be on both a conceptual level, for implementation by HEIs, and at a practical level, for operationalisation by tour-guides themselves.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Ashaq H. Najar and Syed A. Bukhari (2017) note both the importance of defining the research gap and yet it is neglected in certain studies (Najar & Bukhari, 2017). He highlights the existence of theoretical and contextual gaps. The research problem of this study relates to a theoretical gap linked to employability capital, as applied to the contextual areas of tour-guides' employability and the role of HEIs in this regard. Employability capital is a term recently coined in employability studies (Peeters et al., 2019, p. 87). To supplement the meaning of employability capital, the current researcher have taken this conceptual gap and applied it to the context of tour-guides' employability which is currently not well-covered. For instance, the defi-

inition of “tourist guide training” has been uncommon in secondary literature, until recently. However, a substantial rise in the demand for tour-guide training has been registered over the last decade (World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations [WFTGA], 2014). A further contextual area is constituted by HEIs’ inadequate scope to respond to the actual employment capabilities required by tourism in general and tour-guiding in particular. In this regard, Vanessa A. Amoah and Tom Baum (1997) as well as Crispin Dale and Neil Robinson (2001) indicate that universities all over the world have started creating tourism-related courses and degrees to respond to the economically important area of tourism (Amoah & Baum, 1997; Dale & Robinson, 2001). Given the pervasiveness of tourism, people were drawn to tourism studies because they felt confident that HEIs would ensure employability in line with the readily available jobs in the various tourism sectors, including tour-guiding. However, Paul R. Fidgeon (2010), Najar and Bukhari (2017), and Nicola Wakelin-Theron, et al., (2018) argue that the experience, skills, and abilities needed in the tourism-and-hospitality work environment are in complete contradiction to HEI programmes, because the latter stress theoretical concepts over practical employability. This suggests that what tour-guides are taught by HEIs does not automatically guarantee them employment after graduation, nor does it equip them adequately for the tourism environment. These gaps prompted the following research questions: a) What are the roles and responsibilities of tour-guides applicable to a WHS such as the Maropeng Visitor Centre? b) What are the employability skills that tour-guides themselves deem as essential? c) How can HEIs contribute to tour-guide employability? A review of the contextual areas that give rise to the explored contextual gaps, the tour guide industry, tour-guide employability, training, and the role of HEIs in tour-guides’ employability, are covered in the next section.

THE TOUR GUIDE INDUSTRY

According to Tourism Tattlers (2020), the classifications of tour guides can be done as adventure guides, nature guides and indigenous or cultural guides. An adventure guide, will conduct adventurous experiences namely abseiling, paddling and rock climbing, whereas a nature guide conducts a nature experience within conservation areas on trails. A cultural guide conducts cultural experiences in a geographical area such as a town, community area or a museum. However the South African tourism authority has defined the different categories of tour-guides as outlined below (SAT, 2014).

Site guide – is a tourist guide authorised to give short, localised tours with a focus on cultural or natural tourist attractions at a specific location. Guides can specialise in one site or be trained to work at various locations.

Provincial guide – is an authorised tour-guide who is qualified to operate in certain provinces, such as Gauteng or Western Cape.

National guide – is an authorised tourist guide who is qualified to operate at a national level, across the provincial borders of South Africa.

Regional guide – is a tourist guide who is authorised to operate in specific regions, for example, within the SADC region. This type of guide is also known as step-on guide, freelance guide, or specialist. He/she travels internationally with tour groups from other regions, to provide an in-depth overview of the areas visited.

TOUR GUIDE EMPLOYABILITY

Being a tourist guide requires complex technical skills. These include presentation skills, leadership skills, group management skills, guidance for individuals with special needs, company knowledge and experience, among others (Makopo, 2018). The interpretation role is among the most important skills to include in tourist-guide training. Thus, upon completing their basic training, tourist guides must be able to interpret all types of tourism items for their customers at the applied interpretation center/ attraction. This entails mastering research skills to assemble pertinent information about the relevant tourism product. Furthermore, field practice in interpreting is required (SAT, 2014; Kose, 2015). Another crucial trait to develop is the ability to speak effectively, which requires good delivery, confidence, and sound reasoning. A few additional important considerations for potential tourist guides include being able to work with people; being comfortable with travelling and working long hours; having access to reliable transportation and phones; not having any medical conditions that would make guiding challenging; and being fluent in English and possibly one foreign language (Naturefriends International, 2018).

The SAT (2014) further characterises the roles and functions of tour guides as project management. This involves greeting and welcoming travellers, planning itineraries, scheduling tours, purchasing tickets to the relevant tourist venues, in advance, and accompanying tourists. If tourists cannot attend planned events due to cancellations, closures, or bad weather, tour guides need contingency planning, problem-solving, and conflict resolution skills (Kose, 2015). Tour guides also potentially obtain and maintain the required tour equipment. They play a community-development role by ensuring that tourists are comfortable and familiar with each area or establishment (SAT, 2014). Thus, according to Makopo (2018), tour guides need to inform and entertain guests.

TRAINING FOR TOUR GUIDE EMPLOYABILITY

The CATHSSETA is the Sector Education and Training Authority in charge of the field training and education of Culture, Arts, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport. The CATHSSETA has approved skills programmes for certifi-

cation in these sectors. For tourism, only two qualifications are registered for the National Qualifications Framework (NQF): the National Certificate in Tourism with specialisation in Guiding (NQF2), and the National Certificate in Tourism with specialisation in Guiding (NQF4) (CATHSSETA, 2013). These training programmes were developed in collaboration with tour operators and other tourism stakeholders. Hence, various combinations would be needed to ensure that one can enroll as a site guide who then specialises in history, nature, or adventure guiding (CATHSSETA, 2013). In this regard, the CATHSSETA (2010) highlights that qualifications in tour-guiding comprise a set of study programmes within complex systems.

The CATHSSETA (2013) observes that tour guides play a role that apps cannot currently fulfill. The presentation of a site by a human guide would often significantly raise the worth of a museum or attraction. Tourist guides also include personal contact and the chance to communicate with a local, which is becoming increasingly popular among travellers. Makiti Guides and Tours (2014) add that tourist guides can provide more than just facts by including a personal perspective and additional statistical evidence. Guides may also “read” their groups and change their presentation to ensure that their visitors have a good time. In addition to the CATHSSETA, a variety of travel-guide associations, such as the World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations, also offer training and certification programmes. The latter are typically led by current tour guides and cover topics such as industry knowledge and tour itinerary design.

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (HEIS)

The practical training institutions, examples as discussed above, are responsible for tour guides’ acquisition of real-world experience, while HEIs are concerned with the development of expertise and the ability to solve social problems (Shyju & Singh, 2018). HEIs are perceived by some people as preparing graduates for workplace learning, whereas other people argue that a closer connection between the industry and academia is essential to fostering employability (Romgens et al., 2020). Wakelin-Theron et al., (2018) state that the rising popularity of tourism has prompted calls for HEIs to educate and prepare students for the work environment by fostering their employability. Fidgeon (2010), Najjar and Bukhari (2017), and Wakelin-Theron et al. (2018) argue that the experience, skills, and abilities needed by the tourism and hospitality work environment are in complete contradiction to the institutional practice of programmes. The latter are often questioned for stressing theoretical concepts over realistic skills. This means that what graduates are taught at HEIs does not automatically secure them employment after graduation and rather contributes to creating an employability gap. Yet, Arti Kumar (2022) notes that university students must not only graduate with knowledge and understanding of the subjects studied at university, but also

with “transferable skills” necessary for employment in the knowledge-based tourism labour market. Nicola Wakelin-Theron (2014) emphasises that it is a HEI’s responsibility to ensure that tourism students are equipped with a high-quality education that can be fully applied to business standards now as well as in the future and with the right technological skills.

Employers’ claims that students lack customer-service skills and the ability to solve issues on their own (Shyju & Singh, 2018). This makes it difficult for them to operate effectively in the tourism industry, where providing excellent service is critical to meeting the needs of visitors and increasing customer loyalty. As a result, tourism education has introduced work-integrated learning (WIL) well as work-integrated education (WIE) as a strategy to promote graduates’ employability. WIL is generally regarded as critical in providing students with the necessary employability skills to succeed in the workplace and WIE exposure to the industry during the facilitation of knowledge through guest visits in the classroom. The process of what, how, and from whom students learn important skills during job placements receives little consideration in evaluations of the efficacy of WIL programmes in enhancing skills growth (Denise, 2013). Wakelin-Theron et al. (2018) state that employability skills are not embedded in a qualification, nor are they assessed; similarly, practical exposure is not embedded in all tourism qualifications, nor has WIE a new concept to bring the industry to the class room. Thus, WIL and WIE encourages collaboration between HE and business. This is critical in developing a curriculum that meets the needs of both the community and the tourism industry.

OVERVIEW OF EMPLOYABILITY CAPITAL

Despite the widespread acknowledgment that personal resources influence individual employability, literature on this topic is scattered. This inhibits the overall understanding of employability capital. Hence, it is essential to understand what employability capitals are, given the existence of various measures for similar concepts. This study reviews employability literature and examines the dimensions of employability capital identified among tour guides operating at a world heritage site. In this regard, this study points to theoretical and conceptual gaps. Limited research has been conducted previously on employability capital, as a theory lens to be applied to tour guides. A conceptual gap aims to clarify employability capital within a specific job, as is the focus of this study (Peeters et al., 2019).

RESEARCH SETTING: MAROPENG VISITOR CENTRE – CRADLE OF HUMANKIND A WORLD HERITAGE SITE (WHS)

The research covers the intrinsic case of the Maropeng Visitor Centre. The figure below shows the research setting within South Africa.

The Cradle of Humankind was declared a WHS in 1999 with more than 10 fossil sites or caves that display evidence human evolution. It has one of the leading fossil discovery paleo-anthropological sites in the world (Makiti Guides and Tours, 2014). Visitors see fossils, learn about theories on how humankind was born, and view stone tools that are up to one million years old. This experience is interpreted by tour guides. Maheshvari Naidu (2008) notes that tour guides are the first people to welcome tourists and the last to bid them farewell and the main role is to offer visitors the best experience and be interpreters, mediators, and group leaders (Naidu, 2008). Maropeng proves that Africa is the assumed birthplace of humankind; it is where our collective umbilical cord lies buried. Maropeng is home to many significant fossil-finds, including the famous Mrs Pless and Little Foot fossils. Some of the older rock art has been discovered at Maropeng in Southern Africa.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

A case study focuses on understanding the particularity and complexity of a single WHS case. The researcher adopted a qualitative, intrinsic case-study design (Stake, 1995). The latter is not only bounded, but also operates within an integrated system. In line with this intrinsic case study, the researcher had a specific interest in studying both the complexity and specificity of tour guides' employability and the characteristics of the related capital in a mega tourism site such as a WHS. Within the case, experiences regarding employability were gleaned through semi-structured interviews with human resource management staff and tour guides. These groups define a purposive sample able to provide insights into the case. Group interviews were conducted with tour guides while an individual interview was led with the HR manager at the WHS. Before the interviews, the participants had to sign an informed consent form that contained a description of the nature of the investigation and the scope of their involvement in the study. The researcher also sought participants' approval to audio-record the interviews. The latter lasted between 30 - 45 minutes. Prior to undertaking the fieldwork, the researcher obtained ethical clearance (No. 215TH23).

SAMPLE

Barbara Kawulich (2004) defines purposive sampling as a form of non-probability sampling which includes the researcher selecting each individual to be a member of the sample based on their specific ability to respond to the research questions. This fitness is based on the participants' experiences, knowledge, and/or expertise. The group interviews conducted with six tour guides aimed to gain in-depth information about their roles, responsibilities and training. Since the HR manager is responsible for selecting, shortlisting, interviewing and hiring the right candidate for

tour guiding, interviewing this staff member assisted in identifying the skills and employability attributes required from tour guides at the WHS. Thus, one Human Resource Management (HRM) and six participants were interviewed in this study, based on the number of available tour guides. The abbreviations Tour Guide (TG) and HRM are used for tour guides and Human Resource Manager, in the table below about the demographic profiles of the interviewees.

Table 1
Study participants' demographic details

Occupation	Qualification before entry	Qualification after entry	Gender	Years of professional experience	
				Limited (< 2 years)	Moderate (2–5 years)
<i>Tour guide</i>					
TG 1	Matric	L2	Male		Extensive
TG 2	Matric	L2	Male		Moderate
TG 3	Matric	L2	Male		Moderate
TG 4	Tourism	L2	Female		Moderate
TG 5	Diploma				
TG 6	Matric	L2	Male		Moderate
	Matric	L2	Female		Extensive
Human Resource Manager HRM			Female		Extensive

Source. Own research.

DATA ANALYSIS

The audio-recordings of the interviews were ethically transcribed. The researcher read and re-read the transcripts to ensure that they became familiar with and versed in the data. A code-to-theory model (Saldaña, 2016) of data analysis was used. According to Syed M.S. Kabir (2016), data coding refers to the process of providing essential, meaningful summaries of the views of the participants (codes) and then converting the codes into a set of meaningful patterns or themes which are subsequently interpreted. Johnny Saldaña (2016) argues that themes provide the basis for a deepened theorising of the existing body of knowledge. The next section provides the findings of the study.

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the study. The themes are aligned to the study's research questions and are supported by central codes. The

themes are evidenced through verbatim excerpts from the interviews. As stated earlier, the central findings are provided by converting the themed research questions into objectives.

Theme 1: Roles and Responsibilities of Tour Guides at the Maropeng Visitor Centre

When tour guides were asked about their roles and responsibilities at the Maropeng Visitor Centre, the following codes found resonance in the data:

- Conduct tours at the museum and Sterkfontein caves
- Provide information to tourists (product knowledge);
- Welcome Guests;
- Make sure quests are safe.

The evidence for the above themes is represented in the following statements:

TG1 stated that: *We take people to the cave and the museum, we explain to them what the site entails, we provide all the information they need*. TG2 supported: *We make sure that our guests are safe and teaching them about this area*. TG3 added: *We also provide information about the cradle of humankind not only about Sterkfontein caves and Maropeng, but we also cover different areas within the cradle*. TG6 supported this by stating: *My role is to tell the story of evolution, I do that by showing people around and learning about the evolution*. TG4 and TG5 summarised tour guides' job thus: *We welcome guests then conduct tours, tell them what they should expect to find inside the museum*. TG6 in addition stated. *We need to make sure that guests are safe all the time, and that they do not wander around unattended in unsafe spaces*.

When the HR manager was asked about her roles and responsibilities at the Maropeng Visitor Centre, the following codes captured her contributions:

- Recruitment of new job candidates;
- Creating training and development opportunities for all staff;
- Providing possibilities for professional growth to employees; and
- Managing employees' long-term planning.

The HRM responded:

I am responsible for interviews, recruitment and new employees' integration. I am also responsible for ensuring that all the documentation required in recruiting someone is completed and that everything is managed effectively between the first day and last day". She noted: "Sometimes further training is necessary for the above-mentioned career progression. Tour guiding establishments and educational institutions or to provide education and HR can help decide which courses and training programs, for an employee, would be most suited for his or her professional journey. HR can also work with managers to make sure the working time of the employee is sufficiently flexible to allow the person to attend classes, so I monitor skill development and training.

All participating tour guides elaborated on their role of providing exciting narrating and knowledge about the Maropeng Museum, including all discoveries and related information that tourists or guests may wish to acquire. This included narrating the discovery of fossils to their guests and transferring their insights and understanding, which the researcher construe as building an emotional connection with the guests. The HR manager, however, referred to such emotional aspects of work as dismissals.

Theme 2: Employability Skills Deemed Important in Tour Guiding

When tour guides were asked about the employability skills that are important to their becoming successful in their role, the following codes were recorded:

- Excellent communication skills;
- Multilingualism and First Aid;
- Patience and friendliness.

The insights into the above themes are contained in the following views. With regards to the skills needed to succeed in their role, TG2 highlighted that: *"You should have good communication skills, know the site's background and be hardworking"*. TG2 supported: *"do not be shy"*. TG3 additionally commented *"to be patient because some guests can be difficult to handle"*.

However, TG4 seemed to simultaneously disagree and agree to some extent:

You do not need any skill, if you can talk and relate to the guests, you can do this job. I was a shy person when I started working here, but now I got to a point where I got used to it and I can do it at any time anywhere, you know, I think is not something you grow up with it and one day I will become a tour guide, it's something within you and you can talk, ah! You can do it as long as you can talk to the people.

The centrality of people-centeredness is reinforced by TG6 who observed that: *"To become a guide you need to be a people's person, if you can't communicate with people then you won't be able to do this"*.

TG6 further identified the following as her three most important skills: *"Your personality, communication and language. I believe language is more important because we get to meet different people with different language barriers so, we need to be able to communicate with them"*.

This was supported by TG6: *Yes, it's good when you are multi-lingual, if you can speak more than three languages fluently it's fine because not everyone understands English*.

TG5 mentioned that my job is interesting that allows learning about many cultures and countries, being exposed to many cultures I am more culturally sensitive.

TG 6 emphasised that:

You do not need to be educated doing this job you just need to know the background or history of what you will be guiding on. This is more like life orien-

tation. You would be extra qualified if you do have First Aid training, as anything can happen whilst you showing people around your site.

When the HRM manager was asked about the employability skills that are important to their becoming successful as a tour guide, the following codes were recorded

- Teamwork;
- Personalise guest experiences;
- Good interpersonal skills.

We need people who understand the purpose of tourism in South Africa, people that are well invested in the area so that they can be able to teach another person about that area. People that can be able to communicate, people that are interested in the history as well as someone who is in love with the area, they'd be guiding in. (HRM)

Based on the HRM's response, when tackling the employability skills deemed, teamwork as an important skill. In addition a tour guides' role is to handle varying tourist numbers, and to conduct good tours by providing accurate and meaningful information, while offering tourists a straightforward and attractive experience. Tour guides help to personalise guests' experience. Therefore, tour guides must be accessible and interpersonally engaged. They must have excellent communication skills, given that they are custodians of a mega tourist site.

Theme 3: HEI Contribution to Tour Guide Employability

Most tour guides indicated that they did not need a specified qualification from a HEI. Their minimum requirement for entering this job was a matriculation certificate. They received their tour-guiding qualification on the job. The CATHSSETA (2010) acknowledges the persisting absence of formal education requirements for tour guides, the majority of whom only have a high school or matriculation certificate. The tour guides received CATHSSETA NQF level 2 qualification which is mostly focused on on-site guiding. According to South African Tourism (SAT) (2014), a level 2 qualification equips a guide with the knowledge of his/her area. This allows the guide to operate effectively in that geographical area.

The findings indicated that the WHS did not have to pay for the training, as it was funded by the CATHSSETA. The offered training classes focus on all the necessary abilities for a tourist guide. This training prepares the certificate-holder to conduct tours not only at Maropeng but also across South Africa at various WHS. However, the first aid was funded by the organisation to which the tour guides were affiliated.

When tour guides and were asked about the tour-guiding training and qualification required for the former to become successful in their role, the following codes were aggregated into the theme:

- On-site training;
- The minimum requirement is a matriculation certificate;

- Tour-guiding certifications are received after training.

The insights into the above codes are gained through interviews, as exemplified by the following excerpts. For instance, TG2 noted that: *“What they need is matric and the company paid for our training”*. Half of participants confirmed that they received training from the organisation side and it is continuing. TG6 further explained: *“We received our qualifications after training for two months right here.”* TG6 elaborated on the qualifications received by noting that: *“When it comes to guiding there is level 1, level 2 which is us. Then there is level 4 that’s when you do provinces”*. TG2 summarises the qualification aspect thus: *“After training, we received a tourism-graded certificate level 2 and a Gauteng badge accredited by CATHSSETA”*

When the HR manager was asked about Tour-guiding training and qualification required at the Maropeng Visitor Centre, the following codes captured the contributions:

- A cultural – site guiding qualification level 1,2 and 3 + First Aid;
- Any qualification is advantageous;
- Prior work-exposure to skills (knowledge, first aid training, additional language, technological skills);
- Knowing how to handle tourists.

The HRM stated that:

Having all the great qualifications is a bonus, especially for the site we are at. We are looking at least to get someone who has gone all the way to at least matric. If they have tourism qualifications, even better because that means they have a better understanding of what the tourism industry requires of them. Otherwise, most of the training will be done on-site and what we are looking to do is to employ the youth around us that we will train them. They even receive first aid training – it will be an advantage if they are equipped with such a skill.

The HRM further noted:

If we receive someone that just came from college, that have been doing a different stream and we have seen this person to have good communication skills and we understand that there is part of history that they love, and we see this person being a good candidate in terms of guiding.

The HRM concluded by observing:

The first thing we need we need the candidate uncredited, so Maropeng Museum and Sterkfontein Cave are both cultural sites, so the first qualification we are going to get is the cultural site guiding which has first aid in case of safety like the cave. They need to have levels one, two and three for first aid and tour guide.

Yet, the practice in which HEI could contribute to tour guide employability was not fully established.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study presented the employability capital for Tour Guides at a specific WHS. The employability capital pointed to the assemblage of resources that the tour-guides and an agent of the employer communicated empirically in the study. Participants in the study highlighted that excellent communication skills, with good interpersonal skills as well as multilinguistic and keeping visitors safe with First aid as an employability attribute is essential. CATHSSETA (2013) corroborates these views by stating that communication is one of the strongest attributes of a tour guide. Having the ability to personalise guest experiences and to interact well with a team are central to the employability capital for tour guides. It is evident that employability is not a one sided approach and to create training and development opportunities to support professional growth and to support long term planning which include the use of technology. Yet, the review of HEI programs alignment were in contrast to the findings of the participants on employability capital, thus pointing to an important finding of this study.

Employability capital also relates to the qualification domain. The participants in the study indicated that the minimum requirement to be a tour guide is a matriculation certificate, and onsite training is essential. According to CATHSSETA (2010) there are no formal education requirements for tour guides. Yet the minimum requirement in the tour guiding industry is a certificate offered or awarded by CATHSSETA on level 1, 2 and 3 with First Aid and deemed competent. Indeed, in-house or onsite training and qualification are tied to employability as it relates to career related competencies. Due to limited awareness of the tour guiding industry, limited qualifications are available to advance in the tour guiding industry. This qualification can be obtained on-site or through the World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations's (WFTGA) training programme for tour guides. Courses cover the essential components of a training programme: knowledge application, research approaches, and practical skills. Yet, it is deemed important that HEIs provide such skills, again, an area that is lacking. This study is in accordance with Sarah McGladdery and Berendine Lubbe (2017) that HEI especially tourism education rethinking the deliverance of tourism and propose a new model and future direction to embrace jobs in the tourism industry.

The main finding of the study confirms that there is a mismatch between what HEI offer and what the tour guide industry requires. This points to an assumption that HEIs perhaps have not yet theorised or applied employability capital for their tourism programs. Should these gaps be addressed, it may result in positive tour guide retention, empowered employees and increase workplace engagement. Training and continued training are important as central shaping dimensions of the tour guide performance, which has an impact on visitors experience and thus affects the profitability of a WHS. The WHS benefits in practical terms through this study, as considered below.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

A good understanding of the employability capital is required from tour guides entering the industry and will contribute positively towards retaining and maintaining tour guides within the industry at a specific site, advancing attractions and obtaining more sustained tour guide employment in the future. This study further assists HEI to improve and to expand their curriculum to include tour guiding employability attributes and knowledge. This study can further be utilised that the tour guiding industry, HEI as well as the tour guides themselves are in accord with what is essential for employment in the tour guiding sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study makes the following recommendations guided by the results. The tour-guiding industry as a whole needs recognition from the HEI sector. The CATHSSETA should collaborate with HEIs to offer short course holders for first-year students in tourism tour-guiding skills and the knowledge of relevant attractions; as the CATHSSETA should also offer tour guides specific certificates, after or during their studies. Consideration should be given to developing a broad-spectrum first-year programme to equip students with pre-determined generic employability skills. These should be embedded and assessed. Work Integrated learning (WIL) or Work Integrated education (WIE) modules should be incorporated into tour guiding in each year of study. This should be done when designing tourism management-related qualifications, so that students can gain practical experience and knowledge and be better equipped when they enter the tour-guiding industry, after graduation. This will eliminate the need for an additional tour-guiding certificate. First aid training would give a competitive advantage to all students. When the latter are eventually working in the industry, they will be able to assist their visitors, when necessary.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has a few limitations. Due to COVID-19, it was difficult to conduct group interviews with tour guides, because health protocols had to be observed. Hence, the researcher was unable to have six tour guides in one room; instead, they were split into two groups of three tour guides per room. Another limitation is that no existing research has explored the question of the employability of tour guides at the Maropeng Visitor Centre. Therefore, the researcher had to develop new information to ensure that graduates understand the importance of employability in the tourist-guiding industry. Nonetheless, this limitation also constituted a research gap. This study was a starting point in understanding the

employability skills applicable to the specified attraction. Future studies can focus on the employability of tour guides as provincial, national and regional guides.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, a degree does not necessarily define employability capital for the tour-guiding profession. However, possessing national experience with qualifications or certificates in an appropriate field, such as leisure, tourism, and paleoanthropology, could be advantageous. Potential tour guides should have plenty of enthusiasm, be accessible, and possess outstanding interpersonal skills and excellent communication skills. They should also be able to function independently and efficiently, and must exhibit a pleasant, 'customer-orientated' attitude.

Employability capital has become a major factor influencing success in the work environment. This study has considered the skills that tour guides at a WHS need to possess to succeed in their role. It is important that tourism graduates understand these skills. This study also revealed the importance of practical courses in tourism education (tour guiding, first aid, and additional languages) and highlighted the imperative to understand students' skills and capabilities within the scope of practical training courses. These courses need to extend beyond theory, to be able to represent a more authentic version of employability capital.

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